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FRIEDRICH SCHLEIERMACHER

On Religion

Speeches to its

Cultured Despisers

TRANSLATED AND EDITED BY
RICHARD CROUTER

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might immediately remember its features, its movements, and its manners and exclaim that you have here or there seen it just this way in real life. But I would deceive you. For it is not found among human beings as undisguised as it appears to the conjurer, and for some time has not let itself be viewed in the form peculiar to it. The particular disposition of various cultivated peoples no longer shows itself so purely and distinctly in individual actions, since their commerce has become more many-sided and what they have in common has increased through all sorts of connections. Only the imagination can grasp the entire idea behind these qualities, which are encountered only singly as dispersed and mixed with much that is foreign. This is also the case with spiritual things, and among them with religion. It is well known to you how everything is now full of harmonious development; and precisely this has caused such a completed and extended sociability and friendliness within the human soul that none of the soul's powers in fact now acts among us distinctly, as much as we like to think of them as distinct. In every accomplishment each is immediately precipitated by polite love and beneficial support of the other and is somewhat deflected from its path. One looks around vainly in this cultured world for an action that could furnish a true expression of some capacity of spirit, be it sensibility or understanding, ethical life or religion.

Do not, therefore, be indignant and explain it as disdain for the present if, for the sake of clarity, I frequently lead you back to those more childlike times where, in a less perfected state, everything was still, distinct and individual. If I begin at once with that theme, and in some way or other meticulously come back to it, this is to warn you emphatically about the confusion of religion with things that sometimes look similar to it and with which you will everywhere find it mixed.

If you put yourselves on the highest standpoint of metaphysics and morals, you will find that both have the same object as religion, namely, the universe and the relationship of humanity to it. This similarity has long since been a basis of manifold aberrations; metaphysics and morals have therefore invaded religion on many occasions, and much that belongs to religion has concealed itself in metaphysics or morals under an unseemly form. But shall you, for this reason, believe that it is identical with one of these? I know that your instinct tells you the contrary, and it also follows from your opinions; for you never admit that religion walks with the firm step of which metaphysics is capable, and you do not forget to observe diligently that there are quite a few ugly immoral blemishes on its history. If religion is thus to be differentiated, then it must be set off from those in some manner, regardless of the common subject matter. Religion must treat this subject matter completely differently, express or work out another relationship of humanity to it, have another mode of procedure or another goal; for only in this way can that which is similar in its subject matter to something else achieve a determinate nature and a unique existence. I ask you, therefore, What does your metaphysics do — or, if you want to have nothing to do with the outmoded name that is too historical for

Second Speech On the Essence of Religion

You know how the aged Simonides, through repeated and prolonged hesitation, reduced to silence the person who had bothered him with the question, "What are the gods after all?"¹ I should like to begin with a similar hesitation about the far greater and more comprehensive question, "What is religion?"

Naturally, this would not be with the intention of keeping silent and leaving you in embarrassment as he did, but that, kept waiting in impatient expectation, you might for a time steadily direct your gaze to the point we seek, while completely excluding all other thoughts. It is, after all, the first requirement of those who only conjure common spirits that onlookers, who want to see their manifestations and be initiated into their secrets, prepare themselves through abstinence from earthly things and through holy silence; then, without distracting themselves by the sight of other objects, they look with undivided attention at the place where the vision is to show itself. How much more will I be permitted to insist on a similar obedience, since I am to call forth a rare spirit that does not deign to appear in any oft-seen familiar guise, a spirit you will have to observe attentively a long time in order to recognize it and understand its significant features. Only if you stand before the holy circles with the most unprejudiced sobriety of mind that clearly and properly comprehends every contour and, full of desire to understand the presented object on its own terms, is neither seduced by old memories nor corrupted by preconceived suspicions, can I hope that, even if you do not come to like my manifestation, you will at least agree with me concerning its form and recognize it as a heavenly being.

I wish I could present religion to you in some well-known form so that you

¹ The story is from Cicero, *De natura deorum*, I.22. Simonides of Ceos (c. 556–468 BC) was a lyric poet and epigrammist from the Aegean, who served after 476 at the court of Hieron in Syracuse. Schliermacher frequently appeals, often ironically, to his audience's post-Winckelmann love of Hellenism; see the references in this speech to Prometheus, Greek mythology, Eleusinian mysteries, and Greco-Roman deities and religion; and in the Fourth Speech to Greek poets, sages, and Plato.

you, your transcendental philosophy?² It classifies the universe and divides it into this being and that, seeks out the reasons for what exists, and deduces the necessity of what is real while spinning the reality of the world and its laws out of itself. Into this realm, therefore, religion must not venture too far. It must not have the tendency to posit essences and to determine natures, to lose itself in an infinity of reasons and deductions, to seek out final causes, and to proclaim eternal truths.

And what does your morality do? It develops a system of duties out of human nature and our relationship to the universe; it commands and forbids actions with unlimited authority. Yet religion must not even presume to do that; it must not use the universe in order to derive duties and is not permitted to contain a code of laws. "And yet what one calls religion seems to consist only of fragments of these various fields." This is indeed the common concept. I have just imparted to you doubts about that; now it is time to annihilate it altogether. The theorists in religion, who aim at knowledge of the nature of the universe and a highest being whose work it is, are metaphysicians, but also discreet enough not to disdain some morality. The practical people, to whom the will of God is the primary thing, are moralists, but a little in the style of metaphysics. You take the idea of the good and carry it into metaphysics as the natural law of an unlimited and plenteous being, and you take the idea of a primal being from metaphysics and carry it into morality so that this great work should not remain anonymous, but so that the picture of the lawgiver might be engraved at the front of so splendid a code. But mix and stir as you will, these never go together; you play an empty game with materials that are not suited to each other. You always retain only metaphysics and morals. This mixture of opinions about the highest being or the world and of precepts for a human life (or even for two) you call religion! And the instinct, which seeks those opinions, together with the dim presentiments that are the actual final sanction of these precepts, you call religiousness! But how then do you come to regard a mere compilation, an anthology for beginners, as an integral work, as an individual with its own origin and power? How do you come to mention it, even if only to refute it? Why have you not long since analyzed it into its parts and discovered the shameful plagiarism?

I would take pleasure in alarming you with some Socratic questions and bringing you to confess that, even in the most common things, you know the principles according to which like must be related to like and the particular subordinated to the universal, and that you only wish not to apply these principles here in order to be able to make fun of a serious subject in a worldly manner. Where, then, is the unity in this whole? Where does the unifying principle lie for this dissimilar material? If it is an attractive force of its own, then you must confess that religion is the highest in philosophy and that metaphysics and morals are only subordinate divisions of it; for that in which two varied but opposed concepts are one can only

² A polemic against the newest wave of "transcendental philosophy," which Schleiermacher associates with Fichte's *Science of Knowledge* (1794), is one of the major aims of his work.

be the higher under which the other two belong. If this binding principle lies in metaphysics, you have recognized, for reasons that are related to metaphysics, a highest being as the moral lawgiver. Therefore annihilate practical philosophy, and admit that it, and with it religion, is only a small chapter of the theoretical. If you want to assert the converse, then metaphysics and religion must be swallowed up by morality, for which indeed, nothing may any longer be impossible after it has learned to believe and in its old age has acquiesced in preparing a quiet spot in its innermost sanctuary for the secret embraces of two self-loving worlds.

Or do you want to say that the metaphysical in religion does not depend on the moral, nor the latter on the former? Or that there is a remarkable parallelism between the theoretical and the practical, and that to perceive and represent this is religion? To be sure, the solution to this parallelism can lie neither in practical philosophy, which is not concerned about it, nor in theoretical philosophy, which, as part of its function, strives most zealously to pursue and annihilate the parallelism as far as possible. But I think that you, driven by this need, have already been seeking for some time a highest philosophy in which these two categories unite and are always on the verge of finding it; and religion would lie so close to this! Would philosophy really have to flee to religion as the opponents of philosophy like to maintain? Pay close heed to what you say there. With all this either you receive a religion that stands far above philosophy as it exists at present, or you must be honest enough to restore to both parts of philosophy what belongs to them and admit that you are still ignorant of what concerns religion. I do not wish to hold you to the former, for I want to take no position that I could not maintain, but you will very likely agree to the latter.

Let us deal honestly with one another. You do not like religion; we started from that assumption. But in conducting an honest battle against it, which is not completely without effort, you do not want to have fought against a shadow like the one with which we have struggled. Religion must indeed be something integral that could have arisen in the human heart, something thinkable from which a concept can be formulated about which one can speak and argue. I find it very unjust if you yourselves stitch together something untenable out of such disparate things, call it religion, and then make so much needless ado about it. You will deny that you have begun deceitfully. You will call upon me to roll out all of the ancient sources of religion – since I have, after all, already rejected systems, commentaries, and apologies – from the beautiful compositions of the Greeks to the holy writings of the Christians, and to state whether I would not find the nature of the gods and their will everywhere, and everywhere praise persons as holy and blessed, who acknowledge the former and fulfill the latter.

But that is precisely what I have said to you. Religion never appears in a pure state. All these are only the extraneous parts that cling to it, and it should be our business to free it from them. After all, the corporeal world provides you with no primal element as nature's pure product – you would then, as happens to you in

the intellectual world, have to regard very rough things as simple – but rather it is only the ceaseless aim of analytic skill to be able to depict such a primal element. In spiritual things the original cannot be brought forth for you, except when you beget it through an original creation in yourselves, and even then only in the moment when you beget it. I beg you, understand yourselves on this point, for you shall be ceaselessly reminded of it. But as far as the sources and original documents of religion are concerned, this interference of metaphysics and morals with them is not merely an unavoidable fate; it is rather an artificial plan and a lofty intention. What is presented as the first and last is not always the truest and highest. If you only knew how to read between the lines! All holy writings are like the modest books that were in use some time ago in our modest fatherland, which treated important matters under a sketchy title. To be sure, they only give notice of metaphysics and morals, and in the end are happy to return to that which they have announced, but you are encouraged to crack open this shell. Thus even the diamond lies wholly enclosed in a base substance, yet surely not in order to remain hidden but rather to be found all the more certainly. To make proselytes out of unbelievers is deeply engrained in the character of religion; those who impart their own religion can have no other purpose. Thus it is in fact hardly a pious deception but an appropriate method to begin with and appear concerned about a matter for which the sensibility already exists, so that something may occasionally and unnoticeably slip in for which the sensibility must first be aroused.³ Since all communication of religion cannot be other than rhetorical, it is a clever engagement of an audience to introduce them into such good company. Yet this device has not only reached but overstepped its goal, since even for you religion's essence has remained hidden under this mask. Therefore it is time to take up the subject from the other end and to start with the sharp opposition in which religion is found over against morals and metaphysics. That was what I wanted. You distracted me with our ordinary concept; I hope it is now settled and you will interrupt me no more.

In order to take possession of its own domain, religion renounces herewith all claims to whatever belongs to those others and gives back everything that has been forced upon it. It does not wish to determine and explain the universe according to its nature as does metaphysics; it does not desire to continue the universe's development and perfect it by the power of freedom and the divine free choice of a human being as does morals. Religion's essence is neither thinking nor acting, but intuition and feeling. It wishes to intuit the universe, wishes devoutly to overhear the universe's own manifestations and actions, longs to be grasped and filled by the universe's immediate influences in childlike passivity. Thus, religion is opposed to these two in everything that makes up its essence and in everything that character-

³ Paul Seifert, *Die Theologie des jungen Schleiermacher* (Gütersloh, 1960), p. 118, cites this as the most explicit "methodological" passage in the work; the passage justifies the rhetorical stance and hermeneutic of the work, which seeks out common assumptions with its audience, even if the argument eventually challenges these assumptions.

izes its effects. Metaphysics and morals see in the whole universe only humanity as the center of all relatedness, as the condition of all being and the cause of all becoming; religion wishes to see the infinite, its imprint and its manifestation, in humanity no less than in all other individual and finite forms. Metaphysics proceeds from finite human nature and wants to define consciously, from its simplest concept, the extent of its powers, and its receptivity, what the universe can be for us and how we necessarily must view it.⁴ Religion also lives its whole life in nature, but in the infinite nature of totality, the one and all; what holds in nature for everything individual also holds for the human, and wherever everything, including man, may press on or tarry within this eternal ferment of individual forms and beings, religion wishes to intuit and to divine this in detail in quiet submissiveness. Morality proceeds from the consciousness of freedom; it wishes to extend freedom's realm to infinity and to make everything subservient to it.⁵ Religion breathes there where freedom itself has once more become nature; it apprehends man beyond the play of his particular powers and his personality, and views him from the vantage point where he must be what he is, whether he likes it or not.

Thus religion maintains its own sphere and its own character only by completely removing itself from the sphere and character of speculation as well as from that of praxis. Only when it places itself next to both of them is the common ground perfectly filled out and human nature completed from this dimension. Religion shows itself to you as the necessary and indispensable third next to those two, as their natural counterpart, not slighter in worth and splendor than what you wish of them.⁶ To want to have speculation and praxis without religion is rash arrogance. It is insolent enmity against the gods; it is the unholy sense of Prometheus, who cowardly stole what in calm certainty he would have been able to ask for and to expect. Man has merely stolen the feeling of his infinity and godlikeness, and as an unjust possession it cannot thrive for him if he is not also conscious of his limitedness, the contingency of his whole form, the silent disappearance of his whole existence in the immeasurable. The gods have also punished this crime from the very beginning. Praxis is an art, speculation is a science, religion is the sensibility and taste for the infinite. Without religion, how can praxis rise above the common circle of adventurous and customary forms? How can speculation become anything better than a stiff and barren skeleton? Or why, in all its action directed outwardly and toward the universe, does your praxis actually always forget to cultivate humanity itself? It is because you place humanity in opposition to the universe and do not receive it from the hand of religion as part of the universe and as something holy. How does praxis arrive at an impoverished uniformity that

⁴ The metaphysical stance sketched here alludes to Kant's reduction of metaphysics to the realm of finite human experience in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

⁵ An allusion to the *Critique of Practical Reason*.

⁶ The notion of religion as a necessary counterpart to "speculation" and "praxis" is retained, though embellished and elaborated in the 1806 and 1821 revisions.

knows only a single ideal and lays this as the basis everywhere? It is because you lack the basic feeling for infinite and living nature, whose symbol is multiplicity and individuality. Everything finite exists only through the determination of its limits, which must, as it were, "be cut out of" the infinite. Only thus can a thing be infinite and yet be self-formed within these limits; otherwise you lose everything in the uniformity of a universal concept. Why, for so long, did speculation give you deceptions instead of a system, and words instead of real thoughts? Why was it nothing but an empty game with formulas that always reappeared changed and to which nothing would ever correspond? Because it lacked religion, because the feeling for the infinite did not animate it, and because longing for it and reverence for it did not compel its fine, airy thoughts to assume more rigorous consistency in order to preserve itself against this powerful pressure. Everything must proceed from intuition, and those who lack the desire to intuit the infinite have no touchstone and indeed need none in order to know whether they have given any respectable thought to the matter.

And how will the triumph of speculation, the completed and rounded idealism, fare if religion does not counterbalance it and allow it to glimpse a higher realism than that which it subordinates to itself so boldly and for such good reason?⁷ Idealism will destroy the universe by appearing to fashion it; it will degrade it to a mere allegory, to an empty silhouette of our own limitedness. Respectfully offer up with me a lock of hair to the manes of the holy rejected Spinoza!⁸ The high world spirit permeated him, the infinite was his beginning and end, the universe his only and eternal love; in holy innocence and deep humility he was reflected in the eternal world and saw how he too was its most lovable mirror; he was full of religion and full of holy spirit; for this reason, he also stands there alone and unequaled, master in his art but elevated above the profane guild, without disciples and without rights of citizenship.

I entreat you to become familiar with this concept: intuition of the universe. It is the hinge of my whole speech; it is the highest and most universal formula of religion on the basis of which you should be able to find every place in religion, from which you may determine its essence and its limits. All intuition proceeds from an influence of the intuited on the one who intuit, from an original and independent action of the former, which is then grasped, apprehended, and

⁷ The designation "higher realism" describes Schleiermacher's philosophical position as compared to Fichte's speculative thought. Like Goethe and Schelling, Schleiermacher felt a deep spiritual kinship with Spinoza and delights in the irony of playing off this pious atheist against Fichte, who had just lost his Jena professorship in the "atheism controversy" and whose *Science of Knowledge* views Spinozism as a form of consistent dogmatism. The chief tenet of this "realism" is that the highest principle of reality, which alone is divine, is inexpressible in thought and that the infinite is knowable only as mediated through the finite.

⁸ See F. Schlegel: "Indeed, I barely comprehend how one can be a poet without admiring Spinoza, loving him, and becoming entirely his" ("Dialogue on poetry (1799-1800)" in *Friedrich Schlegel: Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms*, ed. Ernst Behler and Roman Struc [University Park, PA, 1968], p. 84).

conceived by the latter according to one's own nature.⁹ If the emanations of light – which happen completely without your efforts – did not affect your sense, if the smallest parts of the body, the tips of your fingers, were not mechanically or chemically affected, if the pressure of weight did not reveal to you an opposition and a limit to your power, you would intuit nothing and perceive nothing, and what you thus intuit and perceive is not the nature of things, but their action upon you. What you know or believe about the nature of things lies far beyond the realm of intuition.

The same is true of religion. The universe exists in uninterrupted activity and reveals itself to us every moment. Every form that it brings forth, every being to which it gives separate existence according to the fullness of life, every occurrence that spills forth from its rich, ever-fruitful womb, is an action of the same upon us. Thus to accept everything individual as a part of the whole and everything limited as a representation of the infinite is religion. But whatever would go beyond that and penetrate deeper into the nature and substance of the whole is no longer religion, and will, if it still wants to be regarded as such, inevitably sink back into empty mythology.

Thus it was religion when the ancients, annihilating the limitations of time and space, regarded every unique type of life throughout the whole world as the work and reign of an omnipresent being. They had intuited a unique mode of acting of the universe in its unity, and designated this intuition accordingly. It was religion when, for every helpful event whereby the eternal laws of the world were illuminatingly revealed through contingency, they gave the god to whom it belonged its own name and built its own temple to it; they had comprehended an act of the universe and thus denoted its individuality and its character. It was religion when they rose above the brittle iron age of the world, full of fissures and unevenness, and again sought the golden age on Olympus among the happy life of the gods; thus they intuited the ever-active, ever-living, and serene activity of the world and its spirit, beyond all change and all the apparent evil that only stems from the conflict of finite forms. But when they keep a wondrous chronicle of the descent of these gods or when a later faith trotted out for us a long series of emanations and procreations, that is empty mythology. To present all events in the world as the actions of a god is religion; it expresses its connection to an infinite totality; but while brooding over the existence of this god before the world and outside the world may be good and necessary in metaphysics, in religion even that becomes only empty mythology, a further development of that which is only the

⁹ The universality, necessity, independence, and nonconceptual nature of Schleiermacher's notion of intuition are commensurate with Kant's use of intuition, even if Schleiermacher's broad, all-encompassing notion of intuition and its intimate association with religion are notably unlike Kant. Cf. *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781; London, 1961), p. 65: "In whatever manner and by whatever means a mode of knowledge may relate to objects, *intuition* is that through which it is in immediate relation to them, and to which all thought as a means is directed. But intuition takes place only in so far as the object is given to us."

means of portrayal as if it were the essential itself, a complete departure from its characteristic ground.

Intuition is and always remains something individual, set apart, the immediate perception, nothing more. To bind it and to incorporate it into a whole is once more the business not of sense but of abstract thought. The same is true of religion; it stops with the immediate experiences of the existence and action of the universe, with the individual intuitions and feelings; each of these is a self-contained work without connections with others or dependence upon them; it knows nothing about derivation and connection, for among all things religion can encounter, that is what its nature most opposes. Not only an individual fact or deed that one could call original or first,¹⁰ but everything in religion is immediate and true for itself.

A system of intuitions? Can you imagine anything stranger? Do views, and especially views of the infinite, allow themselves to be brought into a system? Can you say that one must look at a thing a certain way just because one had to look at something else in such a manner? Others may stand right behind you, right alongside you, and everything can appear differently to them. Or do by chance the possible standpoints on which a mind can stand in order to observe the universe progress in measured intervals so that you can exhaust, enumerate, and precisely determine the characteristic of each? Are there not infinitely many of these, and is not every entity only a continual transition between two others? I speak your language in these matters, for it would be an infinite business, and you are not accustomed to connect the concept of something infinite with the term "system," but rather the concept of something that is limited and completed in its limitation. Elevate yourselves at once – after all, it is still an elevation for most of you – to that infinite dimension of sensible intuition,¹¹ to the wondrous and celebrated starry sky. The astronomical theories, which orient a thousand suns with their world systems around a common point and seek for each common point again a higher world system that could be its center, and so on into infinity, outwardly and inwardly – surely you would not want to call this a system of intuitions as such? The only thing to which you could attribute this name would be the age-old work of those childlike minds that have gathered the infinite mass of these phenomena into definite, but scanty and unseemly, pictures. But you know that there is no semblance of a system in that, that still other stars are discovered between these pictures, that even within their limits everything is undetermined and endless, and that the pictures themselves remain something purely arbitrary and highly change-

¹⁰ The German terms *Tatsache*, *Handlung*, *erst*, and *ursprünglich*, which are used to express the first principle of consciousness, the principle of identity, or $A=A$, leave no doubt that the target is Fichte's *Science of Knowledge*. See Fichte, *Sämtliche Werke* (Berlin, 1845) I, pp. 91ff.

¹¹ The expression *sinnliche Anschauung* is traceable to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 93, and elsewhere. Schleiermacher uses the term for our immediate apprehension of objects in the world in which concepts play no mediating role. Schleiermacher comes closest to his predecessor where Kant plays tribute at the end of the *Critique of Practical Reason* (Indianapolis, 1956), p. 166, to the wondrous effect on the human mind of "the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me."

able. When you have persuaded another person to join you in drawing the image of the Big Dipper onto the blue background of the worlds, does he not nevertheless remain free to conceive the adjacent worlds in contours that are completely different from yours? This infinite chaos, where of course every point represents a world, is as such actually the most suitable and highest symbol of religion. In religion, as in this chaos, only the particular is true and necessary; nothing can or may be proved anything else. Everything universal under which the particular is supposed to be treated, each collection and combination of this sort, either exists in a different territory, if it is to be referred to the inner and essential realm, or is only the work of playful imagination and freest caprice. If thousands of you could have the same religious intuitions, each of you as an individual would certainly draw other outlines in order to portray how you viewed them alongside or in succession to one another; that would depend not on each mind but, rather, on an accidental condition, on a triviality. Individual persons may have their own arrangement and their own rubrics; the particular can thereby neither win nor lose. Those who truly know about their religion and its essence will utterly subordinate to the particular every apparent connection and will not sacrifice the smallest part of the particular to it. The realm of intuition is so infinite precisely because of this independent particularity.

If you place yourself at the most distant point of the material world, you will not only see from there the same objects in another order; and if you wish to cling to your former arbitrary images that you do not find there again, you will be completely in error. Instead you will even discover wholly new objects in new regions. You cannot say that your horizon, even the broadest, comprehends everything and that nothing more is to be intuited beyond it, or that nothing within this horizon escapes your eye, even the best aided. You find limits nowhere and are not able to think of any. This is true of religion in an even far higher sense: from an opposite point you would receive new intuitions not only in new regions; but also in old, well-known places the first elements would unite in different forms and everything would be different. Religion is infinite not only because acting and being acted upon ceaselessly alternate between the same limited matter and the mind – you know that such thinking is the sole infinity of speculation – not only because it is, like morality, internally incapable of completion; it is infinite in all respects, an infinity of matter and form, of being, of vision, and of knowledge about it. This feeling must accompany everyone who really has religion. Each person must be conscious that his religion is only a part of the whole, that regarding the same objects that affect him religiously there are views just as pious and, nevertheless, completely different from his own, and that from other elements of religion intuitions and feelings flow, the sense for which he may be completely lacking.

You see how immediately this lovely modesty, this friendly inviting tolerance springs from the concept of religion and how intimately tolerance nestles up to it. How wrongly, therefore, do you turn on religion with your reproaches that it is

bent on persecution¹² and spitefulness, that it wrecks society and makes blood flow like water. Indict those who corrupt religion, who want to inundate it with philosophy and fetter it to a system. What is it in religion over which men have argued, taken sides, and ignited wars? Sometimes over morals and always over metaphysics, and neither of these belongs to it. Philosophy indeed strives to accommodate those who wish to know under one common knowledge, as you can daily see; but religion does not strive to bring those who believe and feel under a single belief and a single feeling. It strives, to be sure, to open the eyes of those who are not yet capable of intuiting the universe, for every one who sees is a new priest, a new mediator, a new mouthpiece; but for just this reason it avoids with aversion the barren uniformity that would again destroy this divine abundance.

The mania for system does indeed reject what is foreign, even if it is quite conceivable and true, because it could spoil one's own well-formed ranks and disturb the beautiful connections by claiming its place. In this mania lies the seat of contradiction; it must quarrel and persecute; for to the extent that the particular is again related to something individual and finite, the one can indeed destroy the other through its existence. But in the infinite everything finite stands undisturbed alongside one another; all is one, and all is true. Moreover, only the systematizers have caused all this. Modern Rome, godless but consistent, hurls anathemas and excommunicates heretics; ancient Rome, truly pious and religious in a lofty style, was hospitable to every god and so it became full of gods. The adherents of the dead letter that religion casts out have filled the world with criers and tumult; the true contemplators of the eternal have ever been quiet souls, either alone with themselves and the infinite or, if they glanced around themselves, happily granting his own way to everyone who only understood the mighty word. But with this broad view and this feeling of the infinite, religion also looks at what lies outside its own realm and contains in itself the capacity for unlimited multiplicity in judgment and in contemplation that, in fact, cannot be found elsewhere. No matter what inspires a person — I exclude neither ethical life nor philosophy but rely instead, as far as they are concerned, on your experience — his thinking and striving, to whatever object they may be directed, draw a narrow circle around him in which his highest lies enclosed and outside of which everything appears to him to be common and unworthy. Whoever only thinks systematically and acts from principle designs himself and wants to accomplish this or that in the world inevitably circumscribes himself and constantly sets himself in opposition to what as an object of aversion does not further his actions. Only the drive to intuit, if it is oriented to the infinite, places the mind in unlimited freedom; only religion saves it from the most ignominious fetters of opinion and desire. Everything that exists is necessary for religion, and everything that can be is for it a true indispensable image of the infinite; it is just a question of finding the point from which one's relationship to

12 "Gedanken I" (no. 121), *KGA* 1.2, p. 31: "Religion has never persecuted."

the infinite can be discovered. However reprehensible something may be in another connection or in itself, in this respect it is always worthy of existence and of being preserved and contemplated. To a pious mind religion makes everything holy and valuable, even unholiness and commonness itself, everything it comprehends and does not comprehend, that does or does not lie within the system of its own thoughts and is or is not in agreement with its peculiar manner of action; religion is the only sworn enemy of all pedantry and all one-sidedness.

Finally, to complete the general picture of religion, recall that every intuition is, by its very nature, connected with a feeling. Your senses mediate the connection between the object and yourselves; the same influence of the object, which reveals its existence to you, must stimulate them in various ways and produce a change in your inner consciousness. This feeling, of which you are frequently scarcely aware, can in other cases grow to such intensity that you forget both the object and yourselves because of it; your whole nervous system can be so permeated by it that for a long time that sensation alone dominates and resounds and resists the effect of other impressions. But that an action is brought forth in you, that the internally generated activity of your spirit is set in motion, surely you will not ascribe this to the influence of external objects? You will, of course, admit that this lies far beyond the power of even the strongest feelings and must have a completely different source in you. The same is true for religion. The same actions of the universe through which it reveals itself to you in the finite also bring it into a new relationship to your mind and your condition; in the act of intuiting it, you must necessarily be seized by various feelings. In religion, however, a different and stronger relationship between intuition and feeling takes place, and intuition never predominates so much that feeling is almost extinguished.

On the contrary, is it really a miracle if the eternal world affects the senses of our spirit as the sun affects our eyes? Is it a miracle when the sun so blinds us that everything else disappears, not only at that moment, but even long afterward all objects we observe are imprinted with its image and bathed in its brilliance? Just as the particular manner in which the universe presents itself to you in your intuitions and determines the uniqueness of your individual religion, so the strength of these feelings determines the degree of religiousness. The sounder the sense, the more sharply and definitely will it apprehend every impression. The more ardent the thirst and the more persistent the drive to grasp the infinite, the more manifoldly will the mind itself be seized by it everywhere and uninterruptedly, the more perfectly will these impressions penetrate it, and the more easily will they awaken again and again and retain the upper hand over everything else. That is how far the realm of religion concerns us in this respect; its feelings are supposed to possess us, and we should express, maintain, and portray them.

But should you wish to go beyond that dimension with these feelings, should they cause actual actions and incite you to deeds, then you find yourselves in an alien realm. If you still hold this to be religion, however rational and praiseworthy

your action may appear, you are absorbed in an unholy superstition. All actual action should be moral, and it can be too, but religious feelings should accompany every human deed like a holy music; we should do everything with religion, nothing because of religion. If you do not understand that all action is supposed to be moral, then I add that this also applies to everything else. People should act calmly and whatever they may undertake should be done with presence of mind. Ask the moral, the political, and the artistic person, and all will say that this is their first precept; but calm and thoughtfulness are lost when a person permits himself to be driven to action by the powerful and disturbing feelings of religion. It is also unnatural that this should happen, for by their very nature religious feelings inhibit the strength of our action and invite us to calm and dedicated enjoyment; that is why the most religious people, for whom other impulses to action were lacking and who were nothing but religious, forsook the world and yielded themselves wholly to leisurely contemplation. Man must first master himself and his pious feelings before they press actions out of him; and, if I may refer directly to you, it is a part of your accusation that so many senseless and unnatural things have come to pass in this way. You see, I concede not only this point to you but also the most excellent and most praiseworthy ones. Whether meaningless rites are manipulated or good works performed, whether humans are slaughtered on bloody altars or whether they are made happy by a charitable hand, whether life is spent in dead inactivity or in dull, tasteless order or in frivolous and sumptuous sensual desire, these are certainly things that differ widely from one another if we wish to talk about morality or life and worldly affairs; but if they are supposed to pertain to religion and to have arisen from it, then they are all the same as one another, only slavish superstition, each one like the others.¹³

You reproach the person who lets his behavior toward another person be determined by the impression the other makes upon him. You desire that even the most accurate feeling about the impact of a human being should not lead us to action for which we have no better grounds; thus that person is also to be reproached whose actions, which should always be oriented toward the whole, are solely determined by the feelings that precisely this whole awakens in him. He is singled out as someone who sacrifices his honor, not only from the standpoint of morality, because he gives way to extraneous motives, but also from that of religion, because he ceases to be what, in its eyes, alone gives him unique worth, a free part of the whole, active through his own power. This entire misunderstanding that religion is supposed to act can, at the same time, be nothing other than a dreadful misuse, and to whichever side the activity should turn, it ends in mischief and ruin. But to have the soul full of religion while performing a calm action that must

¹³ Negative references to practices of human sacrifice, religions of good works, mystical quietism, and the routine behavior of monastic life vividly illustrate Schleiermacher's affinity with the eighteenth-century Enlightenment's desire to distinguish true religion from superstition. See, e.g., David Hume, *The Natural History of Religion* (1757; Stanford, CA, 1957).

proceed from its own source, that is the goal of the pious. Only evil spirits, not good ones, possess a person and drive him, and the legions of angels with which the heavenly Father had equipped his Son were not in him but around him;¹⁴ they also did not help him in his actions, nor were they supposed to, but they instilled serenity and rest into a soul wearied by deed and thought. Occasionally he lost sight of them in the moments when his whole power was roused to action, but then they hovered around him again in joyous throng and served him.¹⁵

But before I lead you into the particulars of these intuitions and feelings, which must certainly be my next business with you, permit me first for a moment to mourn the fact that I cannot speak of both other than separately. The finest spirit of religion is thereby lost for my speech, and I can disclose its innermost secret only unsteadily and uncertainly. But reflection necessarily separates both; and who can speak about something that belongs to consciousness without first going through this medium? Not only when we communicate an inner action of the mind, but even when we merely turn it into material for contemplation within ourselves and wish to raise it to lucid consciousness, this unavoidable separation immediately occurs. This state of affairs intermingles with the original consciousness of our dual activity, what predominates and functions outward and what is merely sketching and reproducing, which seems rather to serve things. Immediately upon this contact the simplest matter separates itself into two opposing elements, the one group combining into an image of an object, the other penetrating to the center of our being, there to effervesce with our original drives and to develop a transient feeling. We cannot escape this fate even with the innermost creation of the religious sense; we cannot call up its products to the surface again and communicate them except in this separate form. Only do not think — for this is one of the most dangerous errors — that in the first stirring of the mind religious intuitions and feelings may originally be as divided as we must unfortunately consider them here. Intuition without feeling is nothing and can have neither the proper origin nor the proper force; feeling without intuition is also nothing;¹⁶ both are therefore something only when and because they are originally one and unseparated.

That first mysterious moment that occurs in every sensory perception, before intuition and feeling have separated, where sense and its objects have, as it were, flowed into one another and become one, before both turn back to their original position — I know how indescribable it is and how quickly it passes away.¹⁷ But I

¹⁴ Matthew 26:53.

¹⁵ Matthew 4:1–11.

¹⁶ This passage plays on the Kantian dictum: "Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind" (*Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 93).

¹⁷ The "love scene" passage, which expresses the idea that the highest principle (reality itself or the divine) is inexpressible yet nonetheless of deepest significance in human experience, may be compared to the Socratic "myth of the soul" in Plato's *Phaedrus* 244–57, where sexual imagery expresses the union of passion and intellectual eros. Schleiermacher views *Phaedrus* as the programmatic statement of the Platonic corpus; see his *Introductions to the Dialogues of Plato* (reprint 1836; New York, 973), pp. 48f.

wish that you were able to hold on to it and also to recognize it again in the higher and divine religious activity of the mind. Would that I could and might express it, at least indicate it, without having to desecrate it! It is as fleeting and transparent as the first scent with which the dew gently caresses the waking flowers, as modest and delicate as a maiden's kiss, as holy and fruitful as a nuptial embrace; indeed, not like these, but it is *itself* all of these. A manifestation, an event develops quickly and magically into an image of the universe. Even as the beloved and ever-sought-for form¹⁸ fashions itself, my soul flees toward it; I embrace it, not as a shadow, but as the holy essence itself. I lie on the bosom of the infinite world. At this moment I am its soul, for I feel all its powers and its infinite life as my own; at this moment it is my body, for I penetrate its muscles and its limbs as my own, and its innermost nerves move according to my sense and my presentiment as my own. With the slightest trembling the holy embrace is dispersed, and now for the first time the intuition stands before me as a separate form; I survey it, and it mirrors itself in my open soul like the image of the vanishing beloved in the awakened eye of a youth; now for the first time the feeling works its way up from inside and diffuses itself like the blush of shame and desire on his cheek. This moment is the highest flowering of religion. If I could create it in you, I would be a god; may holy fate only forgive me that I have had to disclose more than the Eleusinian mysteries.

This is the natal hour of everything living in religion. But the same thing happens with it as with the first consciousness of human beings that retires into the darkness of an original and eternal creation and leaves behind for us only what it has produced.¹⁹ I can only make present to you the intuitions and feelings that develop out of such moments. But let this be said to you: If you understand these ever so completely, if you believe you have them in clearest consciousness, but you do not know and cannot show that they have arisen in you from such moments and that they have been originally one and unseparated, then prevail upon yourself and me no further, for surely it is not so; your soul has never conceived. They are only illegitimate children, productions of other souls that you have adopted in the secret feeling of your own weakness. I would characterize such people as unholy and far from all divine life who thus parade around with religion and put on airs. The one individual has intuitions of the world and formulas that are supposed to express them, while the other has feelings and inner experiences by which to document them. The first braids formulas over one another, and the second weaves a scheme of salvation out of experiences; and now conflict ensues as to how many concepts and explanations and how many stirrings and sensations one has to lay hold of in order to *assemble* a sound religion from them that would be neither cold nor overenthused. You fools and slow of heart! Do you not know that all those things,

¹⁸ Like Plato, Schlegelmacher holds that one comes to know the essence or nature of a thing (*Wesen*) only in its manifestation in finite form (*Gestalt*).

¹⁹ The reference to "eternal creation" appears to have been inspired by the Platonist myth of the transmigration of souls.

which your own reflection would have had to make, are only dissolutions of religious sensibility; and if you are not now conscious of having had something reflection was able to disintegrate, where then did you get these? You have memory and imitation, but no religion. You have not produced the intuitions for which you know the formulas, but have learned them by heart and preserved them, and your feelings are mimetically reproduced like alien physiognomies, and for just that reason are caricatures.

Do you want to put together a religion out of these dead and decayed fragments? One can break down the fluids of an organic body into its constituent parts; but now take these separated elements, mix them in every proportion, treat them in every way. Will you be able to make life's blood out of them again? Will what was once dead be able to move again in a living body and become one with it? Every human art runs aground in trying to restore the products of living nature out of their separated constituent parts, and thus you will not succeed in doing it with religion, even though you have imagined its individual elements ever so completely from outside; they must proceed from within. The divine life is like a tender plant whose blossoms are fertilized while enclosed in the bud, and the holy intuitions and feelings you are able to dehydrate and preserve are the beautiful calyxes and corollas that open soon after that secret action, but which also soon drop away again. Yet new blossoms always spring from the fullness of the inner life – for the divine plant forms a paradisiacal climate about itself that no season of the year can harm – and the old ones bestrew and thankfully adorn the earth that covers the roots from which they were nourished and still give up a fragrance in fond memory of the stem that bore them. From these buds and corollas and calyxes I intend to weave a holy wreath for you.

To external nature, which so many consider the first and foremost temple of divinity, the innermost sanctuary of religion, I lead you only as far as its outermost forecourt.²⁰ Neither fear of the material forces you see operating on this earth nor joy at the beauty of corporeal nature will or can give you the first intuition of this world and its spirit. Neither in the thunder of the heavens nor in the frightful rolling of the sea are you to recognize the presence of the almighty being; neither in the bloom of the flowers nor in the brilliance of the sunsets are you to recognize the lovely and benevolent. It may be that both fear and joyous pleasure first prepared the unrefined sons of the earth for religion, but these sentiments themselves are not religion. All presentiments of the invisible that have come to us in this way were not religious but philosophical, not intuitions of the world and its spirit – for they are merely glimpses of the incomprehensible and immeasurable particular – but a seeking and a searching for causation and primal power. These crude beginnings in religion are like everything else that belongs to the original simplicity of nature.

²⁰ Schlegelmacher's resistance to a deification of nature is found in the following section, the themes of which recur in the Fifth Speech's critique of "natural religion."

Only so long as this simplicity is still there does this raw state have power to move the mind; thus it will attain the peak of perfection, on which we do not yet stand, perhaps transformed again into a higher form through art and caprice; but on the path of formation it inevitably and fortunately gets lost, for these crude beginnings would only restrict this cultivation's progress. We find ourselves on this path, and no religion can come to us through these motions of the mind. Indeed, it is the great aim of all diligence that is applied to the formation of the earth²¹ that the dominance of the forces of nature over us would be annihilated and all fear of them cease. How, therefore, could we intuit the universe in what we endeavor to master and have in part already mastered? Jupiter's lightning no longer frightens us since Vulcan has prepared a shield against it. Vesta protects what she won from Neptune against the angriest blows of his trident, and the sons of Mars unite with those of Aesculapius in order to protect us against the quick and deadly arrows of Apollo. Thus, the one god annihilated the other, insofar as fear had formed them, and since Prometheus has taught us to bribe now this one, now that one, we stand as the victor, smiling about their general war.

To love the world spirit and joyfully observe its work is the goal of our religion, and in love there is no fear.²² It is no different with those beauties of the terrestrial globe that the childlike person embraces with such heartfelt love. What is the delicate play of colors that delights your eye in all phenomena of the firmament and with so much pleasure attaches your gaze to the most lovely products of vegetative nature? What is it, not in your eyes, but in and for the universe? For thus you would have to ask if this delicate play is to have some significance for your religion. It disappears as an accidental appearance as soon as you think of the all-pervasive material whose developments it attends. Consider that you can rob all of this beauty from a plant in a dark cellar without destroying its nature; consider that the splendid appearance in whose tendrils your whole soul dwells is nothing other than that the same streams of light are only refracted differently in a greater sea of earthly vapors, that the same midday beams whose glare you cannot endure already appear to those in the East as glimmering twilight – and you must consider this, if you want to regard these things as a whole. You will then find that these phenomena, no matter how strongly they move you, are still not suited to be intuitions of the world. Perhaps someday, at a higher stage, we shall find that to which we are to submit here on earth spread abroad and ruling in the whole of space, and that then a holy thrill concerning the unity and universality of even corporeal power will fill us. Perhaps someday, we shall also be amazed to discover in this appearance the same spirit that animates the whole. But that will be something different from and higher than this fear and this love. Right now the heroes of reason among you do not need to ridicule the fact that some people wish

²¹ Cf. Novalis, "Blütenstaub," *Ath. I*, p. 80, "We are on a mission: to form the earth [*zur Bildung der Erde*] is our calling."

²² 1 John 4:18: "Perfect love casts out fear."

to guide fear and love to religion through humiliation under inanimate matter and through empty poetry, and the sensitive souls must not believe that religion might be so easily arrived at.

Certainly there is something more essential to be intuited in corporeal nature than this. Its infinity, the prodigious masses scattered in that boundless space that runs through immeasurable paths – are we not overcome with reverence at the thought and sight of the world? I only ask you not to identify as religion what you hereby feel. Space and mass do not make up the world and are not the material of religion; to seek the infinite in them is a childish way of thinking. When not half of those worlds were discovered, indeed, when it was not even known that the illuminated points were celestial bodies, the universe was nevertheless no less splendid to behold than now, and there was then no more excuse for the despisers of religion than now. Is not the most limited body just as infinite in this respect as all those worlds? The incapacity of your senses cannot be the pride of your spirit; and what does the spirit care about numbers and quantities, since it sums up the whole of infinity in little formulas and reckons with it just as with the most insignificant things? What actually appeals to the religious sense in the external world is not its masses but its laws. Raise yourselves to the view of how these laws embrace everything, the largest and the smallest, the world systems and the small mote of dust that flutters about restlessly in the air, and then say whether you do not intuit the divine unity and the eternal immutability of the world. What the common eye first perceives of these laws in this intuition of the universe is precisely the least: the order in which all movements return in heaven and on earth, the definite course of the stars and the uniform coming and going of all organic forces, the perpetual uniformity in the striving of malleable nature.

If you only consider a single fragment of a great work of art and in turn perceive in the individual parts of this fragment, outlines and proportions, quite beautiful in themselves, which are contained in this fragment and whose principle can be completely surveyed from this point, will not this fragment seem to you to be more a work in itself than a part of a work? Will you not conclude that the whole, if it is executed in this style throughout, would have to be lacking in inspiration and boldness and all that portends a great spirit? Wherever you suspect a sublime unity, a relationship that reflects greatness, there must necessarily be circumstances in the particular, in addition to the general tendency toward order and harmony, which cannot be completely understood in terms of the individual. Even the world is a work of which you survey only a part, and if this part were perfectly ordered and complete within itself, you would not be able to formulate any lofty concept of the whole. You see that the feature that is often meant to serve to reject religion actually has a greater value for it in its intuition of the world than the order that first presents itself and can be surveyed from a smaller part. In the religion of the ancients only lower deities and ministering virgins had superintendence over what uniformly recurs, whose order was already discovered. The deviations that were

not understood, the revolutions for which there were no laws, were the work of the father of the gods. The perturbations in the course of the stars indicate a higher unity, a bolder combination than that which we have already proved true from the regularity of their paths, and the anomalies, the superfluous touches of malleable nature, compel us to see that it treats its most definite forms with an arbitrariness, with an inventiveness, as it were, whose principle we can discover only from a higher standpoint.²³

How far distant we still are from that which would be the highest, and how incomplete, therefore, remains our intuition of the world! Consider the law according to which everywhere in the world, so far as you survey it, everything alive behaves toward that which in regard to itself can be considered as dead. See how everything living nourishes itself and forcibly draws dead matter into its life, how on all sides there presses in upon us the stored-up supply for everything living, which does not lie there dead but is itself living and everywhere reproduces itself anew, how with all the multiplicity of forms of life and the prodigious mass of material each form consumes in turn, each nevertheless has enough to run through the cycle of its existence, and each is subordinated only to an inner fate and not an external scarcity. What infinite fullness is revealed there, what superabundant riches! How we are seized by the impression of maternal provision and by childlike confidence to play away sweet life in the full and rich world without any cares. Consider the lilies of the field; they neither sow nor reap, and our heavenly Father still nourishes them; wherefore, do not worry.²⁴ But this happy sight, this serene and lighthearted mind was also the highest, indeed, the only thing one of the greatest heroes of religion obtained for his own religion from the intuition of nature. How very much nature must have been located only in the forefront of religion!

Certainly a greater yield is vouchsafed to us who have been permitted by a richer age to penetrate deeper into nature's interior.²⁵ Its chemical powers, the eternal laws according to which bodies themselves are formed and destroyed, these are the phenomena in which we intuit the universe most clearly and in a most holy manner. See how attraction and repulsion determine everything and are uninter-ruptedly active everywhere, how all diversity and all opposition are only apparent and relative, and all individuality is merely an empty name. See how all likeness strives to conceal itself and to divide into a thousand diverse forms, and how nowhere do you find something simple, but everything is ornately connected and intertwined. That is the spirit of the world that reveals itself in the smallest things

²³ See Marshall Brown, *The Shape of German Romanticism* (Ithaca, NY, 1979), pp. 161-70, on the penchant of the Romantic mind for deviant, anomalous, and eccentric (literally, "outside the circle") phenomena as pointing to the need of a higher unity for their completion.

²⁴ Matthew 6:28-9; Luke 12:27-8. Although the descriptions of the forefront of religion may be beautiful, even Jesus of Nazareth only had limited intuitions of external nature.

²⁵ These references to contemporary natural scientific theories allude to the organic and holistic perspective in the early works of Schelling.

just as perfectly and visibly as in the greatest; that is an intuition of the universe that develops out of everything and seizes the mind. But only the person who in fact sees it everywhere, who, not only in all alterations but in all existence, finds nothing else but a production of this spirit and a representation and execution of these laws, only to him is everything visible really a world, formed and permeated by divinity, and is one. Even with a total lack of all the knowledge that adorns our century, the oldest wise men of the Greeks did not, nevertheless, lack this view of nature, a clear proof of how everything that is religion spurns and easily dispenses with every external aid; and if this view had penetrated from the wise men to the people, who knows what exalted path their religion would have taken!

But what are love and resistance? What are individuality and oneness? Did you get these concepts, by means of which nature first actually becomes for you an intuition of the world, from nature? Do they not derive originally from the interior of the mind, and are they not first directed from there to nature? Therefore, it is also the mind to which religion actually looks and from which it takes intuitions of the world; the universe is portrayed in the inner life, and only through the internal is the external comprehensible. But even the mind, if it is to produce and sustain religion, must be intuited in a world.

Let me disclose to you a secret that lies concealed in one of the most ancient sources of poetry and religion.²⁶ As long as the first man was alone with himself and nature, the deity did indeed rule over him; it addressed the man in various ways, but he did not understand it, for he did not answer it; his paradise was beautiful and the stars shone down on him from a beautiful heaven, but the sense for the world did not open up within him; he did not even develop within his soul; but his heart was moved by a longing for a world, and so he gathered before him the animal creation to see if one might perhaps be formed from it. Since the deity recognized that his world would be nothing so long as man was alone, it created for him a partner, and now, for the first time, living and spiritual tones stirred within him; now, for the first time, the world rose before his eyes. In the flesh and bone of his bone he discovered humanity, and in humanity the world; from this moment on he became capable of hearing the voice of the deity and of answering it, and the most sacrilegious transgressions of its laws from now on no longer precluded him from association with the eternal being.

All our history is contained in this holy saga. Everything is present in vain for him who stands aloof; for in order to intuit the world and to have religion, man

²⁶ In turning to the biblical creation story of Genesis 2, a peopled garden is, as it were, substituted for a natural garden. The account of humanity's self-discovery illustrates Schleiermacher's dedication to the interhuman dimension of our experience. He does not recount the narrative of the fall and expulsion from paradise in Genesis 3; even in later years his theological orientation is more Johannine and incarnational, more focused on Christmas than on Good Friday. Yet pain and love go hand in hand in his basic view of religion; see "Sophie" in *Christmas Eve: Dialogue on the Incarnation*, trans. Terrence Tice (Richmond, VA, 1967), for whom joy and sorrow are often "strangely mixed up" (pp. 52, 56, 59).

must first have found humanity, and he finds it only in love and through love. This is why both are so deeply and indissolubly connected, longing for religion is what helps him to the enjoyment of religion. Each person embraces most ardently the one in whom the world is reflected most clearly and purely; each loves most tenderly the one in whom he believes he finds everything brought together that he himself lacks for the completion of humanity. Therefore, let us repair to humanity, that we may find the material for religion.

Here even you are in your most proper and beloved homeland. Your innermost life opens up in you. You see before yourselves the goal of all your striving and action, and simultaneously feel the inner drive of your powers, which constantly leads you toward that goal. Humanity itself is actually the universe for you, and you count everything else a part of this only to the extent that it comes into connection with humanity or surrounds it. I do not wish to lead you beyond this point of view; but it has often pained me deeply that, with all your love for humanity and all your zeal for it, you are nevertheless always embroiled and at odds with it. You labor to improve and educate it, each of you in his own manner, and in the end you disgruntledly leave behind whatever fails to produce the desired result. I may say, this also comes from your lack of religion. You wish to have an effect on humanity, and you look at individual persons. These displease you greatly; and among the thousand causes of your displeasure this is without doubt the most beautiful and one that belongs to the better among you: that in your own way you are entirely too moral. You take people individually, and thus you also have an ideal of an individual to which, however, they do not correspond. All of this together is a wrong beginning, and you will find yourselves far better off with religion. If you would only attempt to interchange the objects of your action and your intuition! Act on the individuals, but with your contemplation rise higher on the wings of religion to an infinite, undivided humanity. Seek it in every individual, look upon the existence of each as a revelation of it to you, and there can remain no trace of all that now oppresses you. I too, know how to pride myself on a moral disposition, I also know how to value human excellence, and, considered by themselves, common things can almost overwhelm me with the unpleasant feeling of disdain; but religion gives me an exceedingly great and splendid view of all.

Think of the genius of humanity as the most accomplished and universal artist. It can create nothing that would not have a unique existence. Living and significant features arise even where genius merely tests its colors or seems to sharpen its brush. The genius of humanity thus imagines countless forms and shapes them. Millions wear the garb of the age and are true images of its needs and its tastes; in others recollections of the prehistoric world or presentiments of a distant future are displayed. Some are the most sublime and striking reproductions of what is most beautiful and divine; others are grotesque products of the most original and fleeting mood of a virtuoso. It is irreligious to hold that humanity's genius prepares vessels

of honor and vessels of dishonor;²⁷ you must consider nothing individually, but rejoice over each in the place where it stands. Everything that can be perceived simultaneously and, as it were, stands on one page belongs to a great historical picture that represents one moment of the universe. Would you despise that which elevates the main groups and gives life and fullness to the whole? Should individual heavenly forms not be exalted by having a thousand others bow down before them and by having someone see how everything looks to them and relates itself to them? There is actually something more than a trite simile in this notion. Eternal humanity is unweariedly busy in creating and in representing itself in the most varied ways in the provisional appearance of finite life.

What would be the point of the uniform repetition of a highest ideal whereby human beings, apart from time and circumstances, are after all actually identical, the same formula being merely combined with other coefficients? What would it be in comparison to this infinite variety of human appearances? Take whatever element of humanity you wish, and you will find each in every possible condition, from a nearly pure one – for nowhere will it be found completely pure – in every possible mixture with every other one, to nearly the most inseparable saturation with all the remaining elements – for this is also an unattainable extreme – with the mixture prepared in every possible way, in every variety and every rare combination. If you can still think of combinations you do not see, even this gap is a negative revelation of the universe, an indication that, given the requisite degree of the present temperature of the world, this mixture is not possible. Your imagination in this respect is a glimpse beyond the present limits of humanity, a truly divine inspiration, an involuntary and unconscious prophecy of what shall be in the future.

But just as this which is missing from the requisite infinite diversity is really not a deficiency, so also that which thus appears to you from your standpoint is not too much. Religion declares that oft-lamented abundance of the commonest forms of humanity, which always recur unchanged in a thousand copies, to be a sham. The eternal understanding dictates, and even the finite understanding can realize, that those forms in which the particular is most difficult to distinguish must stand most densely pressed upon one another. Yet each has something unique. None is like the other and in the life of each there is some moment, like the silvery flash in the melting process of baser metals, when, be it through the close approach of a higher being or through some sort of electrical shock, it is, as it were, raised out of itself and placed on the highest pinnacle of what it can be. For this moment it was created, in this it attended its definition, and after it the exhausted life force sinks back again. It is a special pleasure to help small souls to attain this moment or to observe them in it; but their whole existence must indeed appear superfluous and despicable to those who have never had this experience. Thus the existence of each one has a dual meaning in relation to the whole.

²⁷ Romans 9:21–2.

If I mentally halt the course of that restless bustle whereby everything human is intertwined and made dependent upon one another, I see that, according to their inner essence, all individuals are necessary supplements to the perfect intuition of humanity. One person shows me how every tiny fragment of humanity, if only the inner creative drive²⁸ that animates the whole can quietly progress in it, fashions itself into delicate and well-proportioned forms; another how, from want of a vivifying and unifying warmth, the hardness of the earthly material cannot be overcome or how, in an atmosphere that is too violently agitated, the innermost spirit is disturbed in its work and everything becomes insignificant and indiscernible. One person appears as the vulgar, animal portion of humankind, moved only by the first awkward stirrings of humanity;²⁹ another as the purest distilled spirit that, divorced from all that is base and unworthy, only hovers with a light step above the earth. All are there to show by their existence how these different parts of human nature work separately and in detail. Is it not enough if, among this countless multitude, there are yet always a few who, as the distinguished and higher representatives of humanity, strike one or another melodious chords that require no outside accompaniment and no subsequent resolution, but, through their inner harmony, enrapture and satisfy the whole soul in one tone? If I again observe the eternal wheels of humanity in their progress, then this vast interaction, where nothing movable is moved by itself alone and nothing moving moves only itself, must put me at considerable ease about your complaint that reason and soul, sensuality and ethical life, understanding and blind force appear in such separated proportions. Why do you see everything individually, which surely does not function individually and for itself? The reason of one person and the soul of another affect one another as deeply as could only happen in a single subject. Ethical life, which relates to our sensuality, is posited outside of it. Is its dominion, for that reason, more limited, and do you believe sensuality would be better ruled if ethical life were meted out to each individual in small, scarcely noticeable portions? The blind force that is attributed to the mass of humanity is, nevertheless, in its effect on the whole, not left to itself and to crude chance. Without being aware of it, understanding, which you find abundantly accumulated at other points, often directs this force, and force follows reason just as unknowingly in invisible bonds.

Thus the outlines of personality that appear so definite to you disappear from my

²⁸ The term "creative drive" (*Bildungstrieb*) had been used by Herder in a physical sense and by Schiller as an alternative to the more formal Kantian *Erziehungskraft* to designate the creative power of the human imagination.

²⁹ *Humanität*. The term, which appears once in the text as an alternative to the frequent use of *Menschheit*, here assumes the heightened meaning that was set forth in J. G. Herder's *Letters for the Advancement of Humanity* (1793-7), especially letters 27-9 (1794), *Sämtliche Werke* (Hildesheim, 1967), xvii, pp. 133-43, and his *Ideas toward a Philosophy of the History of Mankind* (1784ff.; Leipzig, 1841), pp. 125ff.; the subsequent argument of speech two qualifies his contemporaries' efforts to place *Humanität* at the center of the universe.

standpoint. The magic circle of prevailing opinions and epidemic feelings encompasses and plays upon everything. Like an atmosphere filled with dissolving and magnetic forces, this circle fuses and unites everything and, through a lively diffusion, places even what is most distant in active contact; it busily scatters the emanations of those in whom light and truth dwell independently so that they penetrate some people and illuminate the surface of others in a brilliant and striking manner. That is the harmony of the universe, the wondrous and great unity in its eternal work of art. But you blaspheme this splendor with your demands for a deplorable individualization because you, who are in the first forefront of morality, and even there still occupied with the basics, despise a lofty religion. Your need is clearly enough indicated; would that you might only recognize and satisfy it! Look among all the occurrences in which this heavenly order is reflected to see if there is not one that reveals itself to you as a divine sign. Allow yourself to enjoy an old rejected concept,³⁰ and seek out among all the holy men in whom humanity is immediately revealed one who could be the mediator between your limited way of thinking and the eternal limits of the world; and when you have found him, go through all of humanity and let everything that heretofore appeared to you differently be illumined by the reflection of this new light.

From these wanderings through the whole realm of humanity, religion then returns to one's own self with sharpened meaning and better-formed judgment, and at last finds everything in itself that otherwise was gathered from most distant regions. When you have arrived there, you will find in yourselves not only the basic characteristics of what is most beautiful and vulgar, most noble and contemptible, which you have perceived in others as individual aspects of humanity. At various times not only will you discover in yourselves all the manifold levels of human powers, but all of the innumerable mixtures of different dispositions that you have intuited in the characters of others will appear to you as mere arrested moments of your own life. There were moments when, in spite of all distinctions of sex, culture, and external circumstances, you thought, felt, and acted this way, when you really were this or that person. You have really passed through all these different forms within your own order; you yourself are a compendium of humanity; in a certain sense your personality embraces the whole of human nature, and in all its versions this is nothing but your own self that is reproduced, clearly delineated, and immortalized in all its alterations. In whomever religion has thus worked back again inwardly and has discovered there the infinite, it is complete in that person in this respect; he no longer needs a mediator for some intuition of humanity, and he himself can be a mediator for many.

Yet you must intuit humanity not only in its being but also in its becoming; it too has a larger course that it does not retrace but on which it progresses; through

³⁰ An allusion to Christology, the human mediation of divinity, a theme that first comes fully to expression in the Fifth Speech.

its inner alterations it too is perfected into something higher and complete. By no means does religion seek to hasten or direct this progress; it limits itself so that the finite can work only on the finite. Rather, religion only wishes to observe and perceive this progress as one of the great actions of the universe. To join the different moments of humanity to one another and, from its succession, to divine the spirit in which the whole is directed, that is religion's highest concern.

History, in the most proper sense, is the highest object of religion.³¹ It begins and ends with religion – for in religion's eyes prophecy is also history, and the two are not to be distinguished from one another – and at all times all true history has first had a religious purpose and proceeded from religious ideas. In its realm, therefore, lies also the highest and most sublime intuitions of religion. Here you see the transmigration of human spirits and souls, which otherwise seem like a delicate literary creation, in more than one sense as a wondrous event of the universe for comparing, with a sure standard, the different periods of humanity. Now after a long interval in which nature could bring forth nothing similar, some distinguished individual being returns who is just as he was before;³² but only the seers recognize this person, and only they shall judge the signs of different times by the effects of this person. Soon a single moment of humanity returns just like its image that a distant bygone time had left behind with you, and you shall recognize the path of the universe and the formula of its laws from the various causes through which the moment has now been produced. Soon the genius of some particular human capacity, which here and there while rising and falling had already completed its course, awakens from its slumber and appears to another place and under other circumstances in a new life, and its quicker prosperity, its deeper action, its more beautiful, more powerful form will indicate how much the climate of humanity has improved and how much more suitable the soil has become for the nourishment of nobler plants.

Here peoples and generations of mortals appear to you just as individual humans appeared in our previous view.³³ Some peoples and generations are venerable and spirited and powerfully and ceaselessly effective without regard to time and space. Other peoples and generations are common and insignificant, only destined to give a particular nuance to a single form of life or form of union, only really living and noteworthy in one moment, only setting forth one thought, producing one concept, and then rushing toward destruction so that this result of their most beautiful flowering can be imprinted in another moment. Just as vegetable nature, through the decline of whole species and from the ruins of whole generations of plants,

³¹ "Gedanken I" (no. 85), *KGA* 1.2, p. 25: "History is always religious and according to its nature religion must be historical."

³² The Platonic myth of the transmigration of souls (e.g., *Phaedrus* 256-7) reflects Schleiermacher's view of the human soul as a microcosm of the universe.

³³ "Gedanken I" (no. 140), *KGA* 1.2, p. 33: "The history of religiosity in the particular, compared with that in the universal, as proof. Every search for truth in religion is blind faith, for it proceeds from the premise that there is supposed to be belief."

brings forth and nourishes new ones, so you also see here how spiritual nature, from the ruins of a splendid and beautiful human world, produces a new one that absorbs its first life force from the decomposed and wonderfully transformed elements of the former.³⁴

While intuiting a universal relationship your glance is so often led back and forth directly from the smallest to the greatest and from the latter back again to the former and moves between the two in living vibrations until it becomes dizzy and can distinguish neither great nor small, neither cause nor effect, neither preservation nor destruction any longer. There then appears to you the form of an eternal destiny whose features bear completely the mark of this condition, a strange mixture of inflexible obstinacy and deep wisdom, of vulgar, heartless force and heartfelt love, of which alternately sometimes the one seizes you and sometimes the other, while each in turn invites you to impotent defiance and childlike resignation. If you then compare the isolated striving of the individual, which has arisen from these contradictory views, with the calm and uniform progress of the whole, you see how the lofty world spirit smilingly strides across all that tumultuously opposes it. You see how the majestic Nemesis unweariedly follows its steps across the earth, how it administers chastisement and punishment to the haughty who resist the god, and how it mows down with an iron hand even the bravest and most excellent who, perhaps with laudable and admirable steadfastness, did not want to bow down before the gentle breath of the great spirit. If you finally want to grasp the actual character of all the changes and all the advances of humanity, religion shows you how the living gods hate nothing as much as death, how nothing but it shall be pursued and overthrown, the first and last enemy of humanity.³⁵ The vulgar, the barbaric, the misshapen shall be engulfed and transformed in an organic development. Nothing shall be a dead mass that is moved only by dead impact and resists only by unconscious friction. Everything shall be its own assembled, much intertwined, and elevated life. Blind instinct, unthinking habit, dead obedience, everything indolent and passive – all these sad symptoms of the asphyxia of freedom and humanity shall be annihilated. The work of the moment and of centuries points in this direction; that is the great, ever-continuous redemptive work of eternal love.

I have only lightly sketched some of the prominent religious intuitions from the realms of nature and humanity; but I have led you up to the final limit of your horizon. Here is the end of religion for those to whom humanity and the universe are of equal worth; from here I may only lead you back again to what is individual and smaller. Yet do not believe that this is at the same time the limit of religion. Rather, it cannot properly stop here, and only on the other side of this point does it gaze directly upon the infinite. If humanity itself is changeable and malleable, if it

³⁴ The depiction of the process of history as an organic unfolding of life, death, and rebirth is characteristic of the Romantic theory of history.

³⁵ 1 Corinthians 15:25: "The last enemy to be destroyed is death."

not only manifests itself differently in the particular but here and there also *becomes* different, do you not sense that it is impossible that humanity itself can be the universe? Rather, humanity itself is to the universe as individual persons are to humanity; it is only an individual form of the universe, a depiction of a single modification of its elements; there must be other such forms by which humanity is circumscribed and to which it is thus opposed. Humanity is only a middle term between the individual and the One, a resting place on the way to the infinite, and a still higher character would have to be found in the human being than our humanity in order to relate us and our appearance directly to the universe. All religion strives after such an intimation of something outside and above humanity in order to be seized by the common and the higher elements in both; but this is also the point where its outlines are lost to the common eye, where it removes itself ever farther from the individual objects by which it could cling to its way, and where its striving after the highest is regarded by most persons as folly.

This is sufficient reference to what lies so immeasurably far from you. Any further word about it would be an incomprehensible speech about which you would not know whence it came or where it was going. If only you had the religion you could have and only were conscious of what you already do have! In fact, if you just consider the few religious intuitions I have now lightly sketched, you will find that they are by far not all strange to you. Something like these intuitions has very likely entered your mind before. But I do not know which is the greater misfortune, to dispense with them altogether or not to understand them; for even then they completely fail to achieve their effect on your mind and you are thereby even deceived by yourselves.

Many among you are familiar with the retribution that strikes everything that tries to resist the spirit of the whole; with the hatred active everywhere toward everything haughty and insolent; and also with the continuous progress of all human things toward a goal. This progress is so certain that, even after many failed attempts, finally one day we nonetheless see each individual thought and plan succeed, which brings the whole closer to this goal. These are intuitions that catch the eye in such a way that they can be considered more an inducement to, than a result of, observation of the world. Many among you are also conscious of these, some even call them religion, but they want these to be religion exclusively; and thereby they want to repress everything else that nevertheless arises in the same way from the same operation of the mind.

How then have they arrived at these severed fragments? I want to tell you how. They do not at all consider this to be religion, which they despise in any case, but rather morals, and only want to slip in the term "religion" in order to give it – or what they consider to be religion – the final blow. If they do not wish to admit this, then ask them why, with an astonishing one-sidedness, they find all of this only in the realm of ethical life? Religion knows nothing of such partisan preference; for it the moral world is not the universe, and whatever would only be valid for morality

would not be an intuition of the universe. In everything that belongs to human activity, in play as well as in seriousness, in the smallest things as well as in the greatest, religion knows how to discover and pursue the actions of the world spirit. What religion is supposed to perceive it must be able to perceive everywhere, for only thereby does religion acquire it as its own. And thus it also finds a divine Nemesis in the fact that the very people who, because they themselves are dominated by ethical life or legality, make religion into a mere insignificant appendage of morals, and only want to take from it whatever serves this end, thereby irrevocably ruin their morality, no matter how much it may already be purified, and thereby sow the seed of new errors. What they say sounds very beautiful; if someone succumbs while acting morally, it is the will of the eternal, and what may not come to pass through us will come into being another time. But even this sublime comfort is not necessary for ethical life; no drop of religion can be mixed with ethical life without, as it were, phlogisticating it³⁶ and robbing it of its purity.

This whole ignorance about religion reveals itself most clearly in their feelings, which are still most widely diffused among you. As deeply as such feelings are connected with those intuitions, as necessarily as they flow from them and can be explained only in terms of them, these feelings are nevertheless thoroughly misunderstood. When the world spirit has majestically revealed itself to us, when we have overheard its action guided by such magnificently conceived and excellent laws, what is more natural than to be permeated by a heartfelt reverence in the face of the eternal and invisible? And when we have intuited the universe and, looking back from that perspective upon our self, see how, in comparison with the universe, it disappears into infinite smallness, what can then be more appropriate for mortals than true unaffected humility? When we also perceive our fellow creatures in the intuition of the world and it is clear to us how each of them without distinction is his own representation of humanity just as we are, and how we would have to dispense with intuiting this humanity without the existence of each one, what is more natural than to embrace them all with heartfelt love and affection without any distinction of disposition and spiritual power? And when we look back from their connection with the whole to their influence on what happens to us, and then consider those who have diminished their own transient nature and the drive to enlarge and to isolate it in order to maintain ours, how can we refrain from feeling a special kinship with those whose actions once defended our existence and happily guided it through its dangers? How can we refrain from that feeling of gratitude that prompts us to honor them as people who have already united themselves with the whole and are conscious of the same in their lives?

When we, on the contrary, consider the normal drives of those who know

³⁶ The German *zu phlogisticieren* refers to the eighteenth-century scientific belief (disproved by Antoine Lavoisier [d. 1794]) in a subtle, inflammable substance called phlogiston.

nothing of this dependence,³⁷ we see how they seize and hold on to this and that in order to fortify and surround themselves with many external deeds, so that they might conduct their isolated lives according to their own free choice and so that the eternal stream of the world might not disturb any of it for them. We also see how fate then necessarily makes all of this hazy and wounds and tortures them in a thousand ways. What is more natural than the most heartfelt compassion toward all the pain and suffering that arise from this unequal battle and toward all the blows that dread Nemesis deals out on all sides? And when we have found out what is everywhere preserved and promoted in the course of humanity and must sooner or later inevitably be vanquished and destroyed if it cannot be transformed or changed, we regard our own action in the world in light of this law. What is more natural than overwhelming remorse over everything in us that is hostile to the genius of humanity; what is more natural than the humblest desire to be reconciled to the deity, than the most ardent longing to turn back and save ourselves, along with all that is ours, in that holy realm that alone is security against death and destruction?

All these feelings are religion, and likewise all others in which the universe is one pole and your own self is somehow the other pole between which consciousness hovers. The ancients certainly knew this. They called all these feelings "piety" and referred them immediately to religion, considering them its noblest part.³⁸ You also know them, but when you encounter something of this sort you wish to persuade yourselves that it is something moral, and assign these sentiments their place in morality; but it neither desires nor endures them. Morals do not like love and affection, but activity, which proceeds wholly from within and is not produced by considering its external object; they know no other awe than that for their own law.³⁹ they condemn as impure and self-seeking whatever can occur out of compassion and gratitude; they abase, indeed despise, humility; and if you speak of remorse, they think of lost time that you unprofitably prolong. Your innermost feeling must also assent to morality's view that all of these sentiments are not intended to produce action, as functions of your innermost and highest life they are self-contained in their own coming and going. Why do you contort yourselves, therefore, and ask mercy for them, if they do not belong there? If it should please you to realize that these sentiments are religion, you need ask nothing for them except their own strict right, and you will not deceive yourselves with unfounded

³⁷ The sole use of the term "dependence" (*Abhängigkeit*) in 1799 foreshadows Schleiermacher's mature definition of religion as "the feeling of utter dependence" in *The Christian Faith* (Edinburgh, 1928), proposition 4.

³⁸ See, e.g., Cicero, who distinguishes piety (*pietas*) and religion (*religio*) from superstition (*superstitio*) and defends the former beliefs and practices against atomism and astral determinism in *De natura deorum*, *De divinatione*, and *De fato*.

³⁹ An allusion to Kant's belief that "duty is the necessity of an action executed from respect for law" in *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* (New York, 1959), p. 16, where respect (*Achtung*) is close to a sense of reverence or awe (*Ehrfurcht*).

claims that you are inclined to make in their name. But when you find similar feelings in morals or some other area, they have merely been usurped. Bring them back to religion, to which this treasure alone belongs; and as the possessor of the same, religion is not the servant of morals or anything else that is an object of human action, but the indispensable friend and their unexceptionable advocate and intermediary with humanity.

That is the level on which religion stands, especially that which is autonomous in it, its feelings. That religion alone gives universality to man I have already implied; now I can explain it more clearly. In all action, be it moral or philosophical or artistic, one is supposed to strive for virtuosity, and virtuosity always limits and makes things cold, one-sided, and hard. It directs the human mind first to one point, and this one point is always something finite. Can we, advancing from one limited work to another, really exhaust our whole infinite energy? Will not, rather, the greater part of it lie unused, and consequently turn against us and consume us? How many of you go to ruin simply because they are too great for themselves! An excess of energy and drive, which never results in a deed because none would be appropriate to it, drives these people restlessly about and is their destruction. Do you want to curb this evil again by having him, for whom one object is too great, unite all three of those objects of human striving or, if you know of still more objects, these also?⁴⁰ That would certainly be your old desire, to have humanity everywhere out of one mold that ever returns – yet if that were only possible! If only those pursuits, as soon as they individually catch our eye, did not stimulate the mind in the same way and strive to rule. Each of them wants to produce works, each has an ideal toward which it strives and a totality it wants to attain, and this rivalry cannot end except in the one suppressing the others.

To what end, therefore, is man supposed to use the energy that each regulated and expert application of his creative drive⁴¹ leaves behind for him? He should not use it in such a way that he would want to shape something else again and actively work toward some other finite end, but so that, without definite activity, he would allow himself to be affected by the infinite and would reveal his reaction to this influence through every type of religious feeling. Whichever of those pursuits of your free and expert action you have chosen, it requires only a little thought to find the universe from each vantage point, and in this you also discover the rest as its command, inspiration, and revelation. Thus to contemplate and to consider them in the whole, not as something isolated and defined in themselves, is the only way in which, having already chosen a mental direction, you can also appropriate whatever lies outside that direction, not once again arbitrarily as art, but as religion, from an instinct for the universe. Because the pursuits again rival one another even in the form of religion, religion also appears more frequently isolated as natural poetry,

⁴⁰ The notion of unifying art, philosophy, and religion, here being criticized, was central to the new "poesie" of Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis.

⁴¹ See n. 28 above.

natural philosophy, or natural morality, rather than completed in its whole form and unifying everything. Thus man posits an infinite beside the finite to which his free choice drives him, an expansive hovering in indeterminability and inexhaustibility alongside the contracting striving for something determinate and complete. Thus he creates an infinite release for his excess of energy and restores the equilibrium and harmony of his being that is irretrievably lost if he gives way to one particular direction without simultaneously having religion. A person's virtuosity is, as it were, merely the melody of his life; and it remains individual tones if he does not add religion to it. The latter accompanies the former in ever-richer variation with all the tones that are not fully repugnant to it, and thus transforms the simple song of life into a full-voiced and magnificent harmony.

If this, which I hope I have indicated clearly enough for all of you, actually makes up the essence of religion, then the question of the proper place of those dogmas and propositions that are commonly passed off as the content of religion is not too difficult to answer.⁴² Some are merely abstract expressions of religious intuitions, and others are free reflections upon original achievements of the religious sense, the results of a comparison of the religious with the common view. To take the content of a reflection to be the essence of the action being reflected upon is such a common mistake that you must not wonder if it is also found here. Miracles, inspirations, revelations, feelings of the supernatural – one can have much religion without coming into contact with any of these concepts. But persons who reflect comparatively about their religion inevitably find concepts in their path and cannot possibly get around them. In this sense, all these concepts surely do belong to the realm of religion, indeed, belong unconditionally, without one being permitted to define the least thing about the limits of their application. The conflict about which event is actually a miracle and wherein the character of a miracle properly consists, over how much revelation there might be and the extent to which and the reasons why one might believe in it, and the obvious effort to deny and to push aside as much as may be done with propriety and discretion in the foolish opinion of thereby doing a service to philosophy and reason, all of these are the childish operations of the metaphysicians and moralists in religion. They confuse all points of view and bring religion into the disrepute of encroaching upon the totality of scientific and empirical judgments. I beg you not to let yourselves be confused, to the detriment of religion, by their sophistical disputations and their hypocritical secrecy about that which they would be all too pleased to make known. However loudly religion demands back all those defamed concepts, it leaves you, your physics, and, may it please God, your psychology inviolate.

What, then, is a miracle? Yet tell me in what language – I am indeed not talking about those which, like ours, have arisen after the decline of all religion – it means anything other than a sign, an indication. And so all these expressions indicate

⁴² "Gedanken I" (no. 86), *KGA* I.2, p. 25: "Dogmas – even original ones – are only born from the religious sense, and afterwards only the skull [*caput mortuum*] of the religious sense is left behind."

nothing else than the immediate relation of a phenomenon to the infinite or universe; but does that exclude just such an immediate connection to the finite and to nature? "Miracle" is merely the religious name for event, every one of which, even the most natural and usual, is a miracle as soon as it adapts itself to the fact that the religious view of it can be the dominant one. To me everything is a miracle, and for me what alone is a miracle in your mind, namely, something inexplicable and strange, is no miracle in mine. The more religious you would be, the more you would see miracles everywhere; every conflict as to whether individual events deserve to be so named only gives me the most painful impression of how poor and inadequate is the religious sense of the combatants. Some prove it by protesting against miracles everywhere, and others by thinking it all depends for them on this and that particular miracle and that a phenomenon must be shaped miraculously in order to be a miracle for them.

What is revelation? Every original and new intuition of the universe is one, and yet all individuals must know best what is original and new for them. And if something of what was original in them is still new for you, then their revelation is also one for you, and I advise you to ponder it well. What is inspiration? It is merely the religious name for freedom. Every free action that becomes a religious act, every restoration of a religious intuition, every expression of a religious feeling that really communicates itself so that the intuition of the universe is transferred to others, took place upon inspiration; for it was an action of the universe by the one on the others. Every anticipation of the other half of a religious event when the one half is given is a prophecy; it was very religious of the ancient Hebrews to measure the divineness of a prophet not by how difficult his prophecy was but quite simply by the outcome,⁴³ for one cannot know whether someone understands religion until one sees whether he has rightly conceived the religious view of this particular thing that affected that person. What are operations of grace? All religious feelings are supernatural, for they are religious only insofar as they are produced directly by the universe; whether they are religious in oneself, each person must judge best.

All these concepts are the first and most essential ones, if religion must indeed have some concepts. They indicate in a most characteristic manner human consciousness of religion; they are all the more important because they identify not only something that may be in religion universally, but precisely what must be in it universally. Indeed, a person who does not see his own miracle from his standpoint of contemplating the world, in whose interior his own revelations do not arise when his soul longs to drink in the beauty of the world and be permeated in its spirit; a person who does not now and again feel with vivid conviction that a divine spirit is driving him and that he speaks and acts out of holy inspiration; a person who is not at least – for this is actually the lowest level – conscious of his feelings as immediate influences of the universe and recognizes something characteristic in them that

⁴³ Deuteronomy 18:22.

cannot be imitated, but which guarantees the purity of their origin by his innermost being, such a person has no religion.

What one commonly calls belief, accepting what another person has done, wanting to ponder and empathize with what someone else has thought and felt, is a hard and unworthy service, and instead of being the highest in religion, as one supposes, it is exactly what must be renounced by those who would penetrate into its sanctuary. To want to have and retain belief in this sense proves that one is incapable of religion; to require this kind of faith from others shows that one does not understand it. You wish to stand on your own feet in all areas and go your own way, but this worthy intent should not frighten you away from religion. Religion is no enslavement and no imprisonment; even here you shall belong to yourselves; indeed this is even the sole condition under which you can share in it.

Except for a few chosen ones, every person surely needs a mediator, a leader who awakens his sense for religion from its first slumber and gives him an initial direction. But this is supposed to be merely a passing condition. A person should then see with his own eyes and should himself make a contribution to the treasures of religion; otherwise he deserves no place in its kingdom and also receives none. You are right to despise the paltry imitators who derive their religion wholly from someone else or cling to a dead document by which they swear and from which they draw proof. Every holy writing is merely a mausoleum of religion, a monument that a great spirit was there that no longer exists; for if it still lived and were active, why would it attach such great importance to the dead letter?⁴⁴ that can only be a weak reproduction of it? It is not the person who believes in a holy writing who has religion, but only the one who needs none and probably could make one for himself. Exactly this contempt of yours for the miserable and powerless venerated of religion, in whom it already died from lack of nourishment before it was born, proves to me that there is a capacity for religion in you. The respect you always pay to its true heroes, and your rebellion against the way in which they have been misused and disgraced through idolatry, confirms me in this opinion.

I have shown you what religion actually is. Have you found anything therein that would be unworthy of your highest human formation? Must you not, in accord with the eternal laws of spiritual nature, yearn all the more anxiously for the universe and strive for a self-effected union with it the more you are separated and isolated by the most specific formation and individuality? And have you not often felt this holy longing as something unknown? Become conscious of the call of your innermost nature, I beseech you, and follow it. Dispel the false modesty in front of an age that is not supposed to define you but that is supposed to be defined and made by you! Turn back to what lies so close to you, especially to you, for whom a violent separation unfailingly destroys the most beautiful part of your existence.

⁴⁴ 2 Corinthians 3:6.

Yet it seems to me that many among you would not believe that I could wish to end my present business here, as if you were of the opinion that the essence of religion cannot really have been thoroughly addressed where nothing at all has been said about immortality and as good as nothing about divinity. Yet remember, I beg you, how from the beginning I have declared myself against these being considered the hinge and chief articles of religion; remember that when I sketched its outlines I indicated the way in which divinity is to be found. What then do you still stand to lose? And why should I do more for one kind of religious intuition than for others? But lest you think I am afraid to say a proper word about divinity because it would be dangerous to speak about it before a judicially valid definition of God and existence had been brought to light and sanctioned in the German empire;⁴⁵ or, on the other hand, lest you believe that I am perpetrating a pious fraud and, in order to be all things to all people,⁴⁶ wish to disparage with apparent indifference what must be for me of far greater importance than I am willing to admit, I want to explain myself a moment longer. I shall try to make clear to you that for me divinity can be nothing other than a particular type of religious intuition. The rest of the religious intuitions are independent of it and of each other. From my standpoint and according to my conceptions that are known to you, the belief "No God, no religion" cannot occur, and I shall also openly state my opinion to you concerning immortality.

Yet first tell me what they mean by divinity and what you intend it to mean. For that legal definition is still not available, and it is obvious that the greatest differences prevail concerning it. To most people God is obviously nothing more than the genius of humanity. Man is the prototype of their God, humanity is everything to them, and in accord with what they consider its events and directives they determine the dispositions and the essence of their God. But now I have told you clearly enough that humanity is not everything to me, that my religion strives for a universe of which humanity, with all that belongs to it, is only an infinitely small part, only one particular transient form. Can a God who would be merely the genius of humanity thus be the highest being of my religion? There may be minds that are more poetic, and I confess that I believe these stand higher, for whom God is an individual being wholly distinct from humanity, the single example of a particular type, and if they show me the revelations through which they know such a God — one or more revelations, for I despise nothing in religion as much as numbers — that will constitute a desired discovery for me, and certainly from this revelation several more will develop in me. But I strive for even more types of beings than one above and beyond humanity, and every class, with its individual being, is subordinated to the universe. Can God in this sense thus be for me anything else than an individual intuition? Yet these may be only incomplete

⁴⁵ Allusion is made to the "atheism controversy," which in March 1799 led to the dismissal of Fichte from his Jena professorship.

⁴⁶ 1 Corinthians 9:22.

concepts of God. If we immediately proceed to the highest concept, to that of a highest being, of a spirit of the universe that rules it with freedom and understanding, religion is still not dependent upon this idea. To have religion means to intuit the universe, and the value of your religion depends upon the manner in which you intuit it, on the principle that you find in its actions. Now if you cannot deny that the idea of God adapts itself to each intuition of the universe, you must also admit that one religion without God can be better than another with God.

To the unrefined person who has only a confused idea and only a dim instinct of the whole and of the infinite, the universe presents itself as a unity in which nothing manifold is to be distinguished, as a chaos uniform in its confusion, without division, order, and law, and from which nothing individual can be separated except by its being arbitrarily cut off in time and space.⁴⁷ For such an individual, who is without any impulse to animate this chaos, blind chance represents the character of the whole; with this impulse, his God becomes a being without definite qualities, an idol or a fetish, and if he accepts several of these, such beings can only be distinguished by the arbitrarily established limits of their realms. At another level of formation, the universe presents itself as a multiplicity without unity, as an indeterminate manifold of heterogeneous elements and forces whose constant and eternal conflict determines its manifestations. Blind chance denotes not its character but a motivated necessity in which one has the task of searching for its foundation and interconnection, with the consciousness of never being able to find it. If the idea of a God is added to this universe, it naturally disintegrates into infinitely many parts, and each of these forces and elements in which there is no unity becomes especially animated; gods arise in infinite number, differentiated by the various objects of their activity, by different inclinations and dispositions. You must admit that this intuition of the universe is infinitely more worthy than the former; do you not also have to admit that the one who has elevated himself to it, but who without the idea of gods bows down before eternal and unattainable necessity, still has more religion than the crude worshipper of a fetish? Now let us climb still higher to the point where all conflict is again united, where the universe manifests itself as totality, as unity in multiplicity, as system and thus for the first time deserves its name. Should not the one who intuit it as one and all thus have more religion, even without the idea of God, than the most cultured polytheist? Should Spinoza not stand just as far above a pious Roman, as Lucretius does above one who serves idols? But that is the old inconsistency that is the gloomy sign of a lack of cultivation, that they reject most vehemently those who stand on the same level as themselves, only at a different point on that level!

Which of these intuitions of the universe we appropriate depends on our sense of

⁴⁷ The rudimentary classification of philosophical and religious worldviews into the tripartite scheme of chaos, multiplicity, and unity in multiplicity (which in the history of religion correspond to animism, polytheism, and monotheism) recurs in the Fifth Speech; cf. his mature systematic theology in *The Christian Faith*, proposition 8, pp. 34–8.

the universe. This is the proper measure of our religiousness; whether we have a God as a part of our intuition depends on the direction of our imagination. In religion the universe is intuited; it is posited as originally acting on us. Now if your imagination clings to the consciousness of our freedom in such fashion that it cannot come to terms with what it construes as originally active other than in the form of a free being, then imagination will probably personify the spirit of the universe and you will have a God. If your imagination clings to understanding in such fashion that you always clearly see that freedom only has meaning in the particular and for the particular instance, then you will have a world and no God.

You will not consider it blasphemy, I hope, that belief in God depends on the direction of the imagination. You will know that imagination is the highest and most original element in us, and that everything besides it is merely reflection upon it;⁴⁸ you will know that it is our imagination that creates the world for you, and that you can have no God without the world. Moreover, God will not thereby become less certain to anyone, nor will individuals be better able to emancipate themselves from the nearly immutable necessity of accepting a deity because of knowing whence this necessity comes. In religion, therefore, the idea of God does not rank as high as you think. Among truly religious persons there have never been zealots, enthusiasts, or fanatics for the existence of God; with great equanimity they were aware of what one calls atheism alongside themselves, for there has always been something that seemed to them more irreligious than this. Even God cannot be imagined in religion except as active, and no one has ever denied the divine life and activity of the universe; religion has nothing to do with the existing and commanding God just as its God is of no use to the physicist or moralist whose sad misunderstandings these are and always will be. But this acting God of religion cannot guarantee our happiness; a free being cannot wish to affect another free being except by making itself known to the other, regardless of whether through pain or pleasure. He also cannot incite us to ethical life, for he is not considered other than as acting, and there can neither be any action upon our ethical life, nor can we conceive of any.

But concerning immortality, I cannot conceal that the way in which most people take it and their longing after it is completely irreligious, exactly contrary to the spirit of religion. Their wish has no other basis than their aversion to that which is the goal of religion. Recall how in religion everything strives to expand the sharply delineated outlines of our personality and gradually to lose them in the infinite in order that we, by intuiting the universe, will become one with it as much as possible. But they resist the infinite and do not wish to get beyond themselves; they wish to be nothing other than themselves and they are anxiously concerned about their individuality. Recall how it was the highest goal of religion to discover a universe beyond and above humanity, and its only complaint was that this goal

⁴⁸ The centrality of imagination (*Fantasie*) in Schleiermacher reflects its pivotal position in contemporary philosophy and aesthetic theory.

would not properly succeed in this world. But they do not want to seize the sole opportunity death affords them to transcend humanity; they are anxious about how they will take it with them beyond this world, and their highest endeavor is for further sight and better limbs. But the universe speaks to them, as it stands written: "Whoever loses his life for my sake, will find it, and whoever would save it will lose it."⁴⁹ The life they would keep is lamentable, for if it is the eternity of their person that concerns them, why do they not attend just as anxiously to what they have been as to what they will be? How does going forward help them if they cannot go backward? In search of an immortality, which is none, and over which they are not masters, they lose the immortality that they could have, and in addition their mortal life with thoughts that vainly distress and torment them. But try to yield up your life out of love for the universe. Strive here already to annihilate your individuality and to live in the one and all; strive to be more than yourselves so that you lose little if you lose yourselves; and if you have fused with as much of the universe as you find here and a greater and holier longing has arisen in you, then we will want to speak further about the hopes death gives to us and concerning the infinity to which we unerringly soar through it.⁵⁰

That is my sentiment concerning these matters. God is not everything in religion, but one, and the universe is more; furthermore, you cannot believe in him by force of will or because you want to use him for solace and help, but because you must. Immortality may not be a wish unless it has first been a task you have carried out. To be one with the infinite in the midst of the finite and to be eternal in a moment, that is the immortality of religion.

⁴⁹ Matthew 10:39; Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24; 17:33; John 12:25.

⁵⁰ Cf. the function of night, darkness, and death as metaphors of infinity, and especially the final hymn, "Longing for death," in Novalis's *Hymns to the Night*, trans. Charles E. Passage (New York, 1960), which was completed in December 1799–January 1800 and appeared in the *Ath.* III, p. 188; John Neubauer, *Novalis* (Boston, 1980), p. 90, observes that "Schlegel's urging that Novalis make use of his 'artistic sense for death' was probably prompted by conversations with the theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher, who was at the time finishing his speeches."

Third Speech On Self-Formation¹ for Religion

What I myself have freely confessed as deeply lodged in the character of religion, the endeavor to make proselytes out of unbelievers, is nevertheless not what impels me to speak to you now about the formation of humans toward this sublime capacity and about its conditions.² Religion knows no other means to that final goal than that it expresses and imparts itself freely.

When religion stirs with all its own power, when in the flow of this movement it sweeps along with it every faculty of one's mind into its service, it thus also expects to penetrate to the innermost being of every individual who breathes its atmosphere. Every homogeneous particle will be touched and, seized by the same vibration, the awaiting ear of a seeker will rejoice upon attaining consciousness of its existence through an answering, kindred tone. Only in this way, through the natural expressions of its own life, does religion wish to arouse what is similar. Where this is not successful, it proudly disdains every external attraction, every violent procedure, calmed in the conviction that the hour is not yet present in which something congenial to itself could stir. This unsuccessful outcome is not new to me. How often have I struck up the music of my religion in order to move

¹ The task of finding adequate equivalents for the German *Bildung* (which is variously rendered by "education," "cultivation," "conscious development," "development," and "formation") is daunting. "Self-formation" echoes the German *Selbstbildung*, which is used in the First Speech, and the idea of forming oneself (*um sich zu bilden*) used in this speech; it captures the notion of "form" of *bilden*, while the addition of "self" connects the idea of development with the immediacy of self-discovery that features prominently in German philosophy and literature of the period.

² On the theme of *Bildung* in the era, see J. G. Herder, *Letters for the Advancement of Humanity* (1793–7), especially letter 27 (1794), "That which is divine in our species is thus *Bildung*, aiming at humanity," *Sämtliche Werke* (Hildesheim, 1967), XVII, p. 138; the impact of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* and the genre of the *Bildungsroman* is seen in *Ath.* I in Novalis's "Blütenstaub," p. 78 ("The highest task of *Bildung* is to take possession of one's transcendental self, to be the self of one's self") and in Schlegel's review, "Über Goethe's Meister," pp. 323–54; cf. F. Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, trans. Reginald Snell (New York, 1954 [original 1795]), on the artistic formation of selfhood as the central task of the age.